

POV ALERT – SPECIAL ATTENTION TO MOTORCYCLES

We lost 266 Soldiers to accidents in FY04--the highest number since 1991. For those not deployed, a whopping 79 percent of those deaths occurred while the Soldiers were behind the wheel of a vehicle. In the CENTCOM theater, driving accounted for 60 percent of our accidental deaths.

FY05 is quickly heading down the wrong path. To date, POV accidents account for 75 percent of the FY05 accidental deaths--this equates to one Soldier dying on the road every other day. We have already lost 13 Soldiers: 9 of them died while in or on POVs on the road; 3 of those were on motorcycles this past weekend.

We need to take a hard look at our high-risk Soldiers who ride motorcycles. Allow me to share the initial reports on three of the four last motorcycle fatalities.

1. While operating a motorcycle on a four-lane, grooved, concrete road after leaving a local club, the driver approached a "T" intersection in excess of 90 mph and failed to stop. As a result, the motorcycle contacted a 6-inch concrete curb and continued for 12 feet, striking the installation's chain-link perimeter fence. The driver and passenger were ejected from the vehicle, traveling over 100 feet each. The motorcycle came to rest 45 feet from the initial impact. Neither was wearing a helmet. The driver suffered serious injuries and the passenger died. Alcohol was involved.
2. While operating a motorcycle, the driver reportedly was "doing wheelies" when he lost control and hit a guardrail. His helmet came off and he died in the crash.
3. While operating a motorcycle, the driver lost control and ran into a ditch. He was thrown into oncoming traffic, where he was struck by a POV and killed.

We don't have them finalized, but the initial reports indicate two of the fatalities came when the Soldier operators were "doing wheelies." Other Soldiers witnessed both events, yet no one spoke up. First-line leaders need to uncover and stop this type of dangerous activity.

My JAG reports that our returning combat veterans have purchased thousands of motorcycles from AAFES. We have no idea how many were purchased from other sources.

Motorcycle operation is THE MOST RISKY type of vehicle driving. Others often don't see a bike on the road. Two wheels offer far less traction and control for the operator. The power-to-weight ratio is much higher than other transportation. Crash protection, even with personal protective equipment (PPE), is minimal. These factors and more are cause for leader concern and aggressive involvement. Find out who owns motorcycles in your formations. Get to know what training and experience they have and discuss how they drive.

Let me know if we can help with your programs. You can visit our website for POV Tool Box (3rd edition). I especially invite you to use the "Motorcycle Operator/All Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Requirements and Individual Responsibilities Agreement" and Commander's Policy on Motor Vehicle Violations/POV Safety. These tools may help with accountability if drivers fail to act safely during their motorcycle operations. Don't forget ASMIS-1 POV. This interactive risk-management tool works...over 115,000 assessments thus far and only one POV fatality. Use our tools, but more than that, stay engaged!

Please help your Soldiers by giving them incentives to act safely and consequences when they don't. Change their behavior while you still can--we don't want death to be their consequence.

Be Safe—Make it Home...Wherever you are!
Joe Smith, BG
Director of Army Safety